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The Book of Ruth

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The Book of Ruth

*An Exhibition of
Prints and Books*

La Salle University Art Museum
Spring, 2001

Frontispiece, from a 1927
woodcut illustration by
Valenti Angelo

The History

The Book of Ruth is one of the most engaging and well-crafted stories of the Bible. Set in the town of Bethlehem, the narrative begins with the experiences of Elimelech and his family—their suffering during a famine; their refuge in the country of the Moabites, where his two sons marry Moabite women; the father's death and, ten years later, the death of both sons.

The focus of the story then moves to the mother Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth, who insists on returning to Israel with Naomi. As the first of four chapter ends, they arrive in Bethlehem “just as the barley harvest was beginning.”

In order to provide food, Ruth doesn't hesitate to begin work as a charity case. She starts working in one of the fields, collecting bits of

grain left by the hired gleaners. Providentially she begins her work in a field belonging to Boaz, a kinsman of Elimelech and Naomi. Boaz is aware of Ruth's great loyalty and generosity to Naomi. He makes sure that his workers leave more than usual in her path—and he makes an additional gift at the end of the day.

Naomi weighs the implications of Boaz's kindness, knowing that the Jewish Law urges a relative to marry a widow in order to continue the family line. She suggests that Ruth meet Boaz secretly and ask for his help. This meeting ends happily and, in the final chapter, Boaz sets about to deal with a remaining problem: in Bethlehem there is a closer kinsman than he to Elimelech's family. The other kinsman, however, declines to buy Elimelech's remaining property or to marry the widow Ruth. So the wealthy Boaz does marry Ruth. Their first son is Obed, the grandfather of

David—and as Matthew indicates in his gospel, an early forebearer of Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph.

The women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without next-of-kin. May the name of your dead son be kept alive in Israel! The child will give you renewed life and be your support and stay in your old age, for your devoted daughter-in-law, who has proved better to you than seven sons, has borne him.' (Ruth 4, 14-15)

The story of Ruth, then, is rich in the ways of providence, in the rewards of strong family bonds, in rare tolerance between different tribal members, more often enemies than friends.

The Artist

The prints of the Book of Ruth exhibited here are from a suite of eighteen woodcuts by the contemporary Israeli artist Maty Grünberg. They were published by the Osband Press, LTD, London in an edition of 125 portfolios, of which ours is number 86.

Each print has a facing page attached, with related scripture passages and commentary by Linda Zisquit. But these pages here are folded behind the illustrations in order to present a larger selection of the prints. The woodcuts are dramatic (Mr. Grünberg was, in former years, a stage designer for the Israeli theater); somewhat abstract and surreal, in a style that utilizes the grain of the woodblock; and with intense contrast of color.

The Prints

1. Elimelech took his family to the land of the Moabites.
2. Naomi urged her daughters-in-law, "Go back to your own mothers."
3. Ruth answered, "Do not urge me to go back and desert you."
4. They arrived in Bethlehem just as the barley harvest was beginning.
5. Then Ruth went gleaning in the field of Boaz.
6. Boaz said, "I have been told of what you have done for Naomi."
7. "Boaz", Naomi explained, "Is one of our very near kinsmen".
8. "My daughter, I want to see you settled happily," said Naomi.

9. "You are proving yourself" said Boaz, "More devoted to the family...."
10. "Ruth related all that the man had done for her, and she added, "He gave me these six measures of barley...."
11. Boaz also stopped ten of the town's elders and asked them to sit there.
12. So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife... and she gave birth to a son.

The Books

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Among the examples of the Book of Ruth displayed in the hall cases, the well-preserved Latin Bible of 1517 (#3) is meant to suggest the long tradition of Bible illustration in Medieval miniatures and Renaissance woodcuts.

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The other exhibits, however, are fine editions of the subscription Book Clubs and commercial printers as well as “private” presses, the small printing houses of the 19th and 20th centuries. The last continued the tradition of hand-set type on quality paper and bindings, with hand-painted decoration and hand-crafted illustration all in a limited edition.

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The hard work and devotion of such printers is, perhaps, best illustrated here by the small, 1927 work of Valenti Angelo (#8). The accompanying announcement refers to the fine press work, the

hand work in illustrations and decoration, quality paper and binding with case—all for the pricey sum of three dollars!

The Books

Case I

1. The Book of Ruth

Decorated, set, and hand-painted by David Graves. Limited edition 61/100
(Yapton, Arundel, Sussex: The Swanbourne [Press], 1926.)

2. The Book of Ruth

Taken from an edition of the Bible printed in Oxford in 1680. Woodcut illustrations and designs by Ralph Fletcher Seymour.
(Indianapolis: The Bobbs Merrill Company Publishers, 1904.)

3. Biblia Sacra (Bible in Latin)

With some woodcut illustrations ascribed to 16th century Nuremberg pupils of Dürer, such as Erhard Schon and Hans Springinklee.

(Lyon: Jacques Sacon for Anton Koberger, 1518.)

Case II

4. The Bible For My Grandchildren

Arranged from the King James version by Ruth Hornblower Greenough with reproduction illustrations from designs by William Blake. (Privately Printed, 1959.) Lent by Mrs. Robin Satinsky, The Robin Collection.

5. The Book of Ruth and Boaz according to the King James Version of the Holy Bible

Limited edition: 9/150. (New York: Press of Valenti Angelo, 1949.)

6. The Story of Ruth

Graphically told by Z. Raban with an introduction by Professor M.M. Kaplan. (New York: American-Palestine Art Publishing Co., 1930.)

Case III

7. The Book of Ruth

With reproduction illustrations of water colors by Arthur Szyk and with a preface by Mary Ellen Chase. Signed and limited edition: 1167/1950. (New York: The Aldus Printers for the Limited Edition Club, 1947.)

8. The Book of Ruth

Woodcut decoration and illuminated initial letters by Valenti Angelo. (San Francisco: For Book Club of California by Edwin and Robert Grabhorn, 1927.)

9. The Book of Ruth

With woodcut illustrations by Jacob Steinhardt
and calligraphy by Franzisca Baruch.

(Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society
of America, 1957.)

Case IV

10. The Book of Ruth

(London: For the Reed Vale Press by De La
More Press, 1934.)

11. The Book of Ruth

With reproduction illustrations after original
watercolors by Arthur Szyk and with a preface
by Mary Ellen Chase. (New York: The
Heritage Press, 1947.)

12. The Five Scrolls

Hebrew texts, English translations,
Introductions, New Liturgies. Edited by
Herbert N. Bronstein and Albert H.
Friedlander. With reproduction illustrations
after the original watercolors by Leonard
Baskin. (New York: Central Conference of
American Rabbis Press, 1984.)